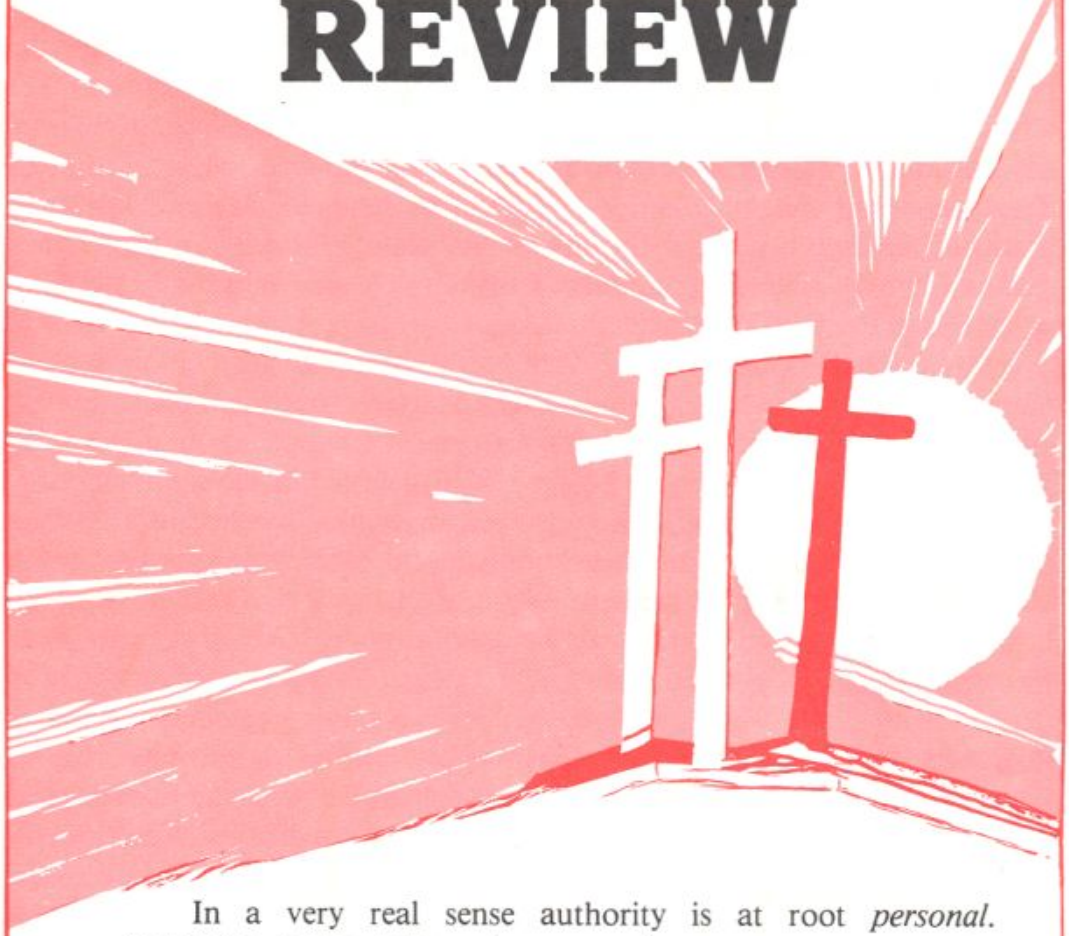
RESTORATION REVIEW



In a very real sense authority is at root *personal*. Authority is the right and power of a person or persons to compel action, thought, or custom. It may be the autocratic power of a dictator or the idealized power of the people of a democracy. Authority is the exertion of power by persons upon persons . . . Laws and principles rest ultimately upon personal grounds. —Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority*, p. 14.

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Volume 27, No. 10 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **December 1985**

The Adventures of the Early Church …

WHAT WAS THEIR AUTHORITY?

This article will contend that the authority of the early church was both a *who* and a *what,* both a Person and a thing. The Person was Jesus Christ, whom they exalted as the Lord of glory; the thing was a collection of documents, the Holy Scriptures, primarily what we call the Old Testament, but finally the New Testament as well, which slowly and gradually became a part of the life of the church. But if we think of the *earliest* church, the first century Christians, their Scriptures would be restricted to the Old Testament.

Even the Scriptures found their authority in their relation to Jesus Christ. This would have to be, for no scroll, parchment, or book is authoritative in and of itself, for these are but words upon a page. The first Christians were Jews who before Christ believed in the authority of the Scriptures (Old Testament), not as a book or books, but because the Word of God spoke through them. Just as Isaiah and other prophets were seen as authoritative, but only because the Word of God spoke through them. This is the only reason any book can be authoritative: *God speaks in it and through it.*

So with Jesus Christ, except that he was more than any prophet or document could ever be. He was a prophet, indeed *the* prophet, through whom God spoke. But he was more, and herein we have the essence of the authority of the early church. Jesus was in himself the Word of God become flesh. He was the Son of God, the Anointed-One of God, or the Messiah. He was in himself their authority in that he was their absolute, and it was not as much what he taught, for other rabbis taught much of what Jesus taught, as what he was. They could at last write “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8), which points to their authority. Jesus is! It is what he was (and is) and what they believed he was (and is) that changed their lives. Words on paper, whether in the form of the Old Testament or the New Testament, would have little authority to them except as they in some way reflected the Person of the Christ.

We see this particularly in our Lord’s words to his apostles following his resurrection: “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk. 24:44). He had taught them that the Scriptures were about him, and this is what brought the Bible alive to them. But they needed help, for mere words never

accomplish God's purpose. The next verse says, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.'"

He (the authority) opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (the indirect authority). He proceeded to tell them what the Scriptures said about him, and yet no scripture says precisely what Jesus "quoted," to the effect that the Christ would die and be raised on the third day. Jesus had told them that now and again, words that seemed incomprehensible to them, but not the Old Testament, not in those words at least. This is Jesus' way of assuring them that the drama that was going on before their very eyes was what the Scriptures were all about. Jesus was the Lord of the Scriptures. They meant what he said they meant. They were about him! Earlier in their confusion over what was going on, he had said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (v. 25) He was saying to them *Why can't you see that the Bible is about me?*

If the Scriptures did not mention crucifixion and a resurrection on the third day in precise terms, Jesus did, and he was the interpreter of Scripture, yea, even the fulfillment of Scripture. He was in a sense the Scriptures personified. Jesus said something like that in bringing the Pharisees to judgment: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn. 5:39). While the Pharisees searched the Scriptures, turning over every stone, they missed the point of the Scriptures.

This is why the Bible is to be judged by Jesus Christ and not Jesus Christ by the Bible. This means the Scriptures are authoritative to us as they reflect, exemplify, and explain the spirit of Christ. And so we really judge the Bible in this way, which is why we all have our "Bible digest" or those selections that mean much more to us than other parts. The powerful 23rd Psalm means more to most believers than all the books of Numbers and Leviticus combined, and the Gospel of John means far more than 2 Peter or Jude. When we make such judgments, and we all do, what is the standard by which we judge? Jesus Christ!

This is why I can judge some Scriptures, such as Ps. 139:22 ("I hate the wicked with a perfect hatred"), as not measuring up to my authority, Jesus Christ, who prayed for, loved, and died for the wicked. I accept Psa. 139:22 as Scripture, and I can understand it (sort of) in the light of the circumstance in which it was written. But I do not have to justify it, for it is not my authority. Jesus is my authority and I measure all Scripture by him, not the other way around.

This is why (and I make myself vulnerable here) I have a problem with the incident of Jesus cursing a fig tree. Jesus, who was always pointing to the beauty of nature, cursing a tree for not having fruit when it was not even the season for fruit? I accept that story as Scripture and conclude that something must have happened about Jesus and a fig tree. Perhaps he told a parable about Israel being like a barren fig tree. But I cannot see Jesus Christ, who blessed the lilies of the field, cursing a tree. So, I judge the story by the spirit of Christ, which is clearly set forth in the Scriptures generally, and conclude that there is something about the account that is skewed. I do not reject the account *per* se but put it on hold until I have more light. This illustrates what I am saying: the Bible must meet the test of Jesus Christ, who is the authority. When the Bible meets this test, which it almost always does, then it is authoritative in an indirect way.

If this is a problem to you, I will have to insist that this is what the church has done through the centuries, including the earliest Christians, and it is what we all do (or should do): judge Scripture (or presumed Scripture) by the spirit of Christ and by apostolic tradition. It was, after all, the church that produced the Bible (the Jews the OT and the Christians the NT) and not the Bible that produced the church. It was the church that decided what was Scripture and what was not. Some books were borderline, such as Barnabas and Hermas, worthy of devotional reading but not on the same level as Scripture. What was the test? Not that a book was inspired. The early church believed the Shepherd of Hermas and Epistle of Barnabas were inspired. Inspiration was not enough. The tradition and background of the book had to be very close to Jesus and the apostles. Paul to the Corinthians was accepted as Scripture; Clement to the Corinthians was not. Who decided? The church.

We all accept the last line of the Lord's Prayer as Scripture: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen," but it is almost certainly a line the church (some resourceful scribe) added along the way. You will notice that it is relegated to a footnote or discarded completely in various versions. It is not considered a part of Jesus' original prayer. Do I accept it as Scripture and do I include it when I say the Lord's Prayer. Yes, because it conforms to the Scriptures as a whole, being drawn from the Old Testament, and especially because it conforms to the spirit of Christ. The dear brother scribe was right: *it* is *a fitting conclusion to the Lord's Prayer.* And so the church around the world, especially Protestants, include that line in the Lord's Prayer, even if Roman Catholics have always reminded us that it is not really Scripture. But that is my point. It *is* Scripture. The church has made it Scripture. There is no Scripture but what the church has made!

Especially for Church of Christ folk is the confession of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 ("I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"), which they will not readily give up. It too will be absent in most of your versions or in a footnote. Even our own J. W. McGarvey, a champion for the integrity of the Bible if ever there was one, conceded that Acts 8:37 (There is no verse 37 in many versions!) is an "emendation, but a justifiable one." Emendation means a correction. It was absent from the original text, or an ancient text, with which a scribe was working. The scribe added the eunuch's confession. He corrected the Bible! Brother McGarvey says he was right in doing so. I agree with brother McGarvey. But where does this put us in reference to "the authority of the Bible?"

We have mixed feelings about another questionable text, the ending of Mark. We want to keep Mk. 16:16, which is a proof text for baptism, but we are less enthusiastic about the next two verses that refer to speaking in tongues, handling serpents, and drinking deadly poison. Is this Scripture or is it not, is it authoritative or not? In the final analysis *you* make that decision for yourself. Your own conscience, enlightened we hope by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme court within you. And by what standard do you judge? Jesus Christ! That is why you are a Christian.

And you are in good company. The earliest Christians had no Scriptures at all, except the Old Testament, and still they had a beautiful fellowship with each other and they had a faith for which they would die. And they were united in one heart and one soul. All without the New Testament! This shows that the Bible was not the basis of their unity and fellowship. Some lived and died, some as martyrs for their faith, without ever seeing a single book of the New Testament. Their authority was a *Who*, not a thing, and thousands of thousands in heaven and on earth affirm it loudly: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and wealth and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12) The earliest church would not have praised any book like that!

This is why we cannot meaningfully refer to a unity based upon the Bible. No book can unite anybody, however precious be that book. Communicative literature has no such power (authority) to make "all nations, tongues, tribes, and peoples" (the Bible's way of referring to all mankind) into one spiritual Body. But Jesus Christ has! This is why we can differ in our understanding of "the Book" and still be united in Christ.

That is why "Book unity" is like trusting in a broken tooth. When the agreement ends the unity ends. No one can change her mind about anything lest she no longer be fellowshipped! You are loved and accepted only so long as you conform! But not so with

unity in Christ. We love and accept each other because Jesus first loved and accepted us. If he is the only one who is able to break the seals and open the Book, then it is he and not the Book that empowers us to accept one another as sisters and brothers, warts and all.

This means that Jesus Christ was the great adventure of the early church and that he was their authority in heaven and on earth. —*the Editor*

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THE GIFT OF PAIN

Our way of life seems to be based on a kind of pleasure-pain philosophy. We seek those pleasures that are the most intense and the most enduring, and we avoid even a semblance of pain. The pleasure-pain principle must be instinctive, closely akin to the instinct of self-preservation. If our Creator had not made eating a pleasure, we'd all be suffering from malnutrition; and if there was no connection between sex and pleasure, the human race would have ceased to exist long ago. We usually view pain, especially severe pain, as evil, and we applaud anesthetics as among the greatest of all discoveries. We now view as unthinkable such an ordeal as surgery without a deadening drug. Even mental or emotional discomfort is eased by the tranquilizer. The ideal is that we live from the cradle to the grave *painlessly* and with maximum pleasure. Of the two experiences, pain has the stronger motivation. We will make greater effort to avoid pain than to achieve pleasure.

The idea that pain is a precious gift of God is foreign to our thinking, and yet the fact is that life would be almost impossible if there were no pain. Diseases would do us in and take their toll if pain did not warn us of their presence. Accidents would plague us if pain did not tip us off when the water is too hot or the weather too cold. It is pain that puts us in bed when we need to be there.

We cannot reject pain without rejecting pleasure or even life itself. Pleasure would have no meaning except for pain. Joy and sorrow, health and disease, wealth and poverty, peace and war, education and ignorance are not as much opposites as they are the stuff of life, with one giving meaning to the other. To overcome hardships is wonderfully satisfying, but this can happen only to those in the throes of difficulty.

Pleasure and pain are thus intertwined, and they are sometimes indistinguishable, such as when an excruciating pain dissipates into a lesser pain, which is pleasure by contrast. Much of the drama of life is a strange mixture of pleasure and pain. A mother watching her

daughter get married will cry and smile at the same time and she experiences both pleasure and pain. A football player experiences both emotions strangely blended when he scores a touchdown while being bruised and battered by his opponents.

Pain a gift of God? Indeed, perhaps as much as pleasure. Or to put it another way, we have one only because we have the other. He who cannot feel pain is terribly deprived. This is what makes leprosy such a dreaded disease. The leper cannot feel pain, which endangers him to serious accidents. The moral leper, one who feels no guilt for his. depraved life and who is insensitive to the feelings of others is also terribly diseased.

The Scriptures recognize pain and adversity as productive of perseverance in the life of the believer. “Count it all joy,” says Jas. 1:2, “when you meet with various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” It goes on to say that perseverance makes one complete, lacking in nothing. This means that God’s purpose to bring us to maturity is realized only through painful trials. So we are to be joyful in the face of adversity, realizing that adversity has its special blessings.

Pain and pleasure find a mysterious blend in the sacrifice of Christ. Heb. 12:2 tells us that “it was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross.” The same writer describes the intensity of Jesus’ suffering: “In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the one able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7). The next verse says “He learned obedience from the things which he suffered.”

If Jesus had to suffer to learn the meaning of submission to God, are we to learn obedience through a painless life? The writer of Hebrews also assures us that it was through suffering that Jesus was made perfect (Heb. 2:10). He stresses the fact that God made Jesus perfect through suffering, enabling him to become the Savior of mankind (Heb. 5:8-9).

Our Lord was of course always morally perfect, but he was not perfect (complete) in what the Father purposed for him until he suffered and died. He thus *learned* obedience. And so he faced the cross with joy as well as anguish, for he realized this would fulfill God’s intentions and place him in glory at the right hand of the Father. Pain and suffering, and yet joy and glory. “It was for the joy set before him …” is one of the most revealing lines in the New Testament. It is a summary of Jesus’ pilgrimage in this world. He was eternally rich in heaven but for our sake he became poor so that we might be rich (see 2 Cor. 8:9). It was a painful, agonizing ordeal and yet it was a pilgrimage of joy. “It was for

the joy set before him …" That is also our rule as his followers. Rather than avoiding the adversities that come upon the believer in this world, we are to accept them in faith and with joy. For the Christian there are blessings in adversity.

We learn this from the story of Lazarus and Dives. The rich man lived "sumptuously" all his days, and he could not feel the pain of the poor man who lay at his gate. In hades Dives pled for mercy but was reminded of his life of ease while his neighbor suffered. The story shows that suffering in this world may mean comfort in the next, while comfort in this world may mean pain in the next.

So-called good luck (health and prosperity) and bad luck (pain and hardship) are fallacies, for there really is no such thing as luck. Life has a way of being what we make it. It is not so much whether good or ill befalls us but how we respond to what happens to us. We can all recall things that we considered "bad luck" at the time, but they turned out to be blessings in disguise. And "good luck" often leads to one's ruin. If we follow the Scriptures and "count it all joy" when adversities come, we will eventually see that even painful experiences are gifts of God, for he uses them to our perfection.

This is why Paul could find contentment even in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, for, as he put it in 2 Cor. 12:10, "when I am weak, then I am strong." Peter likewise points to a fellowship with suffering: "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whosoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Pet. 4:1). That strange passage is at least saying that if we profess to follow the suffering Christ we should accept suffering, but it may also say that suffering with Christ is the surest way of contending with sin. The Scriptures clearly teach that pain for the believer has its blessings both in this world and the next. We all know that beatitude that tells us to "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

This does not mean that we are to be morbid about pain or to out looking for persecution. We can share C.S. Lewis' desire to free mankind of its pain and suffering. He said he would crawl through sewers if he could find an escape for suffering humanity. This rather means that we are to be Christian realists and accept what Jesus has told us, that in this world we will suffer adversity (Jn. 16:33), but "Be of good cheer," he adds, "for I have overcome the world." Pain and pleasure are again strangely mixed. Even amidst our trials we can be of good cheer, which is something different from being giddy or slaphappy, for we believe that we share the victory with Jesus. This is what joy means, which can be ours even when we are brutalized by what life sometimes lays on us. —*the Editor*

When people start trying to get out of this country instead of forming lines to get in —then we'll worry about the capitalistic system. —*Wall Street Journal*

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THE "ROMAN CATHOLIC" CHURCH OF CHRIST

This is intended to be a positive, brotherly study and not "anti," whether in reference to Roman Catholicism or Church of Christism. Both of these churches are making remarkable changes, and I applaud that. While the *old* Catholicism is still a part of the modern church, many Roman Catholics today are as devoted to a renewal of the Christian faith as any of the rest of us. The old party-line of the Church of Christ is also being challenged by many within that church.

This means that the statements made herein do not apply to everyone in these churches. But change and renewal will be hastened if we better understand our problems. To solve any problem we must first understand it. So I am referring to the "Roman Catholic" Church of Christ in an attempt to identify the source of some of our doctrines and practices. This is not to imply necessarily that we "got them from the Catholics," but that we and the Roman Catholics may be misled by the same mentality, whatever be its source.

When we in Churches of Christ come to see that we are much like the *old* Catholicism, it may help us both to understand ourselves better, to be more charitable toward the errors of others, and to make some mid-course corrections.

1. *The infallible church.*

The traditional Roman Catholic sees his church as the only true church, and he refers to "the Church" in the same exclusive way traditional Church of Christ members do. The mind-set for the "true church" fallacy is the same, based on a presumed infallible source. While Roman Catholicism finds the true church in the Holy See that is traceable to St. Peter, the Church of Christ finds the infallible church in exact detail in the New Testament, which it presumes to have "restored." While Roman Catholicism has an infallible succession of popes for its authentic posture, the Church of Christ has an infallible "marks of the true church" for its claim, such as the right name, the right organization, the right doctrine and practice, and the right worship. One names popes all the way back to Peter; the other names doctrines back to Pentecost. Neither is Christ-centered in its emphasis.

Neither says anything like “the church is where Christ is in the hearts of people.” They are both authoritarian in their view of the church (that is, authority is in *the Church),* only in different ways.

2. *An infallible interpretation of Scripture.*

While both of these churches have areas of latitude where differences are allowed, they nonetheless assume an infallible posture in areas where they are unique in their claims. One cannot be “a devout Catholic” who questions the authority of the pope or the sacraments of the church. Nor is one a faithful Church of Christ member if he is not anti-instrumental music, and the “five acts of worship” in the Church of Christ are treated with an intensity similar to the sacraments in the Roman church.

The Church of Christ often assumes an infallibility of interpretation that rivals anything in the Roman church. Whether it be a question about baptism or the divorce and remarriage issue, the proof texts all mean what *they* say they mean, and anyone who differs is branded a false teacher. The defenders of the faith are as infallible and absolute as any pope ever was, and anyone who questions them is often treated with scorn. Fortunately there are many exceptions to this overbearing attitude, but our people generally have a reputation of believing themselves to be right and everyone else wrong. We are infallible interpreters of the Bible!

3. *The confessional and the Father Confessor.*

Since we do virtually the same thing, we should apologize to our Roman Catholic friends for criticizing their confessional. What is the difference between doing penance before one priest in a booth and before two hundred priests (We say each member is a priest) “down front.” One confesses in a booth and the other before a congregation. Priests will sometimes tell a penitent to go to the altar and do 12 “Hail Marys” and 12 “Our Fathers,” and we think that is awful. But we send our penitents “down the aisle” and “up front” in order to make things right. While the priest says “I absolve you,” our congregations, with the minister presiding, says in effect “We forgive you.” Again it is the authority of the church at work.

Since I am truly Protestant and one who looks to the Scriptures and to Jesus Christ as the authority, I do not believe in either of the confessionals. I confess my sins to the heavenly Father and not to any man or group of men, for only God can forgive sins. If I have sinned against someone, yes, of course, I should seek his forgiveness when this is possible, and if I have sinned against an entire church, which would be unlikely, then I might go before the entire church. But our churches make the “down front confessional”

regular procedure. This is how we "restore" folk! It is one more example of how we have institutionalized the church, making the minister and the congregation a Father Confessor.

If we are critical of women whispering their most secret sins into the ears of a young priest, we might question the same thing when it takes place in the minister's study in a Church of Christ. In a Roman Catholic church she at least has the protection of a partition —and sworn secrecy! Not a few of our preachers have succumbed to sin in this unnatural and dangerous practice. The New Testament would have the older women in the church to help the younger in such matters (Tit. 2:3-5).

4. *Gospel of works.*

While the most spiritual minds in both churches have sought to correct this, a doctrine of salvation by works pervade the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of Christ alike. And a works-oriented religion builds more fear than joy in the hearts of its people, along with guilt feelings and uncertainty of one's salvation. The churches are similar in their demand for compliance and conformity. Only the details differ. This results in a joyless faith, all too evident in these churches. I watched as a dear Roman Catholic made her way on her knees for hundreds of yards to a shrine in Mexico City, convinced that this would have atoning power, a practice repeated around the world in Roman churches.

But Church of Christ folk often reflect the same neglect of the grace of God in their attitude toward what they call "acts of worship" or being baptized. It is the ancient error that we are saved by doing good, penitential things, "works of righteousness," which the gospel of the grace of God clearly denies (Titus 3:5). Those victimized by a salvation by works are always uncertain and uneasy about their relation to the heavenly Father, for they can never work hard enough or be right enough to gain assurance.

Works-oriented religion will not draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit. To be Spirit-filled and to be taught by the Spirit are terribly neglected by these churches. Even though "led by the Spirit" is biblical terminology, it is almost an unknown reality. Much of Church of Christism and Roman Catholicism "holds a form of godliness but denies the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). Jesus Christ is lost in forms and systems and isms, even in his own church. Sermons may be preached but not necessarily Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is a tragedy that so many professed Christians hear so little and learn so little about Jesus Christ in their own churches. "I stand at the door and knock," said Jesus to one of his churches (Rev. 3:20), and it must still be true that the Lord is on the outside of many of his churches, seeking entrance. People today are hungry for reality and meaning. We will find receptive hearts when we give them the only ultimate reality there is, Jesus Christ.

5. *An elder-priest-pope hierarchy.*

There is a striking similarity between the Church of Christ system of "eldership" and the Roman Catholic institution of priesthood, especially in reference to authority in the church. No Roman Catholic priest or bishop rules his church or diocese with any more arbitrary power than the eldership in a typical Church of Christ. In both instances there is no semblance of democracy. Decision-making is completely out of the hands of the people. Not only do the people have no say, but they have no recourse in reference to the decisions made for them. The people are expected to pay and perhaps pray, but not to think, at least not in reference to the affairs of the church.

Furthermore, criticism is not welcomed. Indeed, to question either a priest or an elder is unthinkable. If a Roman Catholic places himself under the authority of the pope, the Church of Christ member places himself under the authority of the eldership. That very language is used among Churches of Christ. Since this is so foreign to the spirit of freedom in the Scriptures, we can account for this development in these two churches only in terms of the institutionalization of the Christian faith, which always moves away from freedom to power structures. When our Lord spoke of such power he insisted that "It shall not be so among you" (Lk. 22:25-26). Both of these churches have moved too far from that ideal.

6. *Heresy and heretics.*

In 1616 Galileo was summoned to the inquisition in Rome where his scientific findings were condemned as "foolish, absurd, false in theology, and heretical." He was forced to renounce "the heresy of the movement of the earth," which he had learned from Copernicus, who died before he could be condemned. Galileo remained silent for years, but when a new pope took the throne he again spoke out, supposing the new pope would be more open to scientific progress. He was mistaken. Recantation saved him from torture and death but not from prison. As a heretic he was not allowed burial in his family's tomb. He was a heretic because he believed it was the earth that moved instead of the sun.

While the Church of Christ in its brief history has no such impressive heretics as Copernicus and Galileo, it has nonetheless brought dreadful judgement upon its "heretics" who are of the same kind even if of a lesser order. Deviation from the party line, whether in terms of such prophetic views as premillennialism or even refusing to make instrumental music a test of fellowship, has been equated with heresy. Pat and Shirley Boone, in a celebrated case in California, were "withdrawn from" for speaking in tongues. One church "withdraws" from another, an odd development in the history of polity, because it is "liberal" or because it "fellowships the denominations."

Both churches have, therefore, made heresy a matter of nonconformity, a breach from "what the church believes," and not the New Testament concept which makes the heretic one who is factious. The most peace-loving, Christlike people have been tortured, burned

at the stake, imprisoned, shamefully charged, "written up" and excommunicated or withdrawn from only because they would not conform to orthodoxy. We have been guilty of skimming off the cream by driving away our very best minds, only because they question the *status quo* or plead for change. Both churches have a history of making it a sin to think. Members are expected to accept what they are told.

7. *Obscurantism*

This is the besetting sin of both of these churches, if not of religion in general, for obscurantism is opposition to free and liberal thinking and to human progress and enlightenment. It is a grievous sin in that it is intentional. The obscurantist is deliberately obscure and vague, using jargon or a special vocabulary that the common man cannot understand. In churches generally all through history much of the service, particularly creedal statements, have been nonsense. Sermons are often irrelevant and boring, far removed from people's real needs. Members of churches have become spectators to a "service" that they presume is supposed to be above their heads. They "go to church" with no real expectation of getting anything out of it; they are going more but enjoying it less. But obscurantism is so grievous that it builds fear rather than love in people's hearts.

I know a family whose son has become a Church of Christ minister. Being more open than they, he sometimes preaches in other churches, and once he was the guest speaker in a church near his parent's home. Of course, they wanted to go hear him, but they dare not. Since he was their own son, they might have gotten by with attending a "denominational church" (other than for a funeral or wedding!), but obscurantism was so built into their way of life that they could do nothing but conform.

Obscurant priests and preachers are often so caught up in doing the "right" thing that they can't do the loving thing. I dream of our people becoming so free in Christ that an elder or preacher would call the parents of that young minister and say, "I notice your son is to speak at the Baptist church tonight. My wife and I were just saying that we would like to go along with you to hear him." And there are priests who would surprise the young lady in their church who is getting serious about a Protestant young man if they should say, "That fellow you are dating seems to be a fine chap. How are things going?"

Our high school kids are embarrassed when they hear some of our preachers rave and rant about evolution and the "atheists" who teach such "rot" in our schools when their own biology teacher, who teaches what he believes about the origin of things with more forbearance and Christian grace than those who impugn his motives and call him names. The kids are not any less turned off when their own church leaders make a big deal about "evolution in the textbooks" and make a march on Austin with a view of banning books. Book burning and book banning and book censoring are the "causes" of the obscurantists.

This journal has received some of that kind of attention. Our best advertising comes from those who tell their people not to read us.

Dear old Copernicus was brighter than he was courageous. Once he discovered scientific truths that were destined to change man's view of the universe he dared not reveal his findings, and so for 30 years he remained silent. He feared the church. Finally when he was too old to be reproached by the church he persuaded a frightened printer to publish his findings to the world. Galileo took up where Copernicus left off and we have seen what happened to him. Obscurantism! If we in the Church of Christ are critical of such bondage, we need to ask what we have done to our people when they are uneasy about speaking up in a Bible class and saying what they really think. How many of our folk are free to share something beautiful they heard on TV from Pat Robertson or read from Chuck Swindoll?

Both of these churches have been oppressive in their obscurant attitude toward divorce and the divorced. Again, they are so "right" and "doctrinal" that they know too little of mercy and tenderness. The divorced are often driven from the church. Divorce is treated as the unforgivable sin. We even resort to "forbidding to marry" which the Scriptures treat as a sign of apostasy, in dealing with the divorced, for we tell them that they must remain unmarried. Oddly enough, the Scriptures never forbid a divorced person from marrying. We do have an injunction in 1 Cor. 7:11 that if mates separate they are not to marry but to be reconciled to each other, but this refers to *separated* couples and not divorced. Any divorced person is free to marry and "forbidding to marry" is the doctrine of an obscurant clergy. This does not mean that divorce may not be and often is wrong, but once a union is absolved through divorce another marriage is lawful, even if not always best.

Repressive measures toward the divorced among Churches of Christ is in part tempered these days by the fact that divorce has invaded the homes of our elders and preachers. While unmarried priests do not learn forbearance in this way, they too are having to face the reality that divorce is here to stay and that the church must deal with it in a more positive way. Divorce is often the lesser of two evils, and we have no reason to suppose that God intends for his children to live a hell on earth in an impossible marriage. Divorce is sometimes a blessing, just as surgery is, and much for the same reason.

Obscurantism is willing for the church to remain divided rather for traditions to be threatened. Through the centuries the clergy has preserved division rather than to promote unity. It is serious to charge church leaders. with keeping their own people in darkness, but such is obscurantism.

When I heard of a woman being arrested for attempting to perform priestly service in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, I realized before I criticized that she probably would have fared no better in a Church of Christ. Both churches have been less than magnanimous in their attitude toward the ministry of women. Obscurantism has blurred our vision of the great principle laid down by the apostle Paul, *In Christ there is neither male nor female.*

The essence of all this is that these two churches have lost the Christ in the morass of systems and obscurities. When Luther called for reform in his church, his superiors, convinced that the people found security in rosaries, candles, and penances, asked Luther what he would give the people in their stead. *I'll give them Jesus Christ,* he insisted. Even yet we have not learned Luther's lesson, for we still give the people anything and everything except Jesus Christ. It is the grace of God that is obscured. We have not persuaded our own people nor the world around us that we really believe that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

But I will close in the same spirit in which I began and say that I have confidence that Roman Catholics and Churches of Christ, perhaps more than any other denominations, have much to contribute to the renewal of the church at large. It may be for the same reason that Saul of Tarsus, a legalistic Pharisee, has so much to offer once he discovered the grace of God as manifested in the cross of Christ, for which he was willing to suffer the loss of all things, as if they were refuse. But also because these two churches have an uncommon zeal. It seems to be those that "go from one extreme to the other" (so goes the criticism) that make a difference in our world.

Moreover, these two churches are demonstrating that hard-line strongholds of absolutism can be invaded by the grace of God and the freedom that is in Christ, and that by their own people. Beachheads for the grace of God *are* being won, and so long as these churches have to cope with their own "heretics" we can have hope for tomorrow. —*the Editor.*

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THE SACRIFICES OF CAIN AND ABEL

Cecil Hook

Cain and Abel, the firstborn of mankind, offered sacrifices in worship to God. Cain offered the fruit of his labors from the field while Abel offered the fruit of his labors from the flock. Abel and his worship were accepted by God while Cain and his offering were rejected. We read: “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of the flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Gen. 4:3-5). This brief account has greatly influenced our understanding of worship.

Generally, it has been concluded that Cain’s sacrifice was rejected because he did not, like his brother, offer a blood sacrifice in an effort to atone for his sins. But I, and others who are smart like I am, have offered a different explanation which went something like this: Abel offered by faith (Heb. 11:4); faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17); so, Abel did what God told him while Cain did not. Cain, according to my explanation, might have offered the wrong thing, the wrong amount, at the wrong time, in the wrong way, with the wrong attitude, or for the wrong purpose. He had many possibilities for rejection!

However, more recently, while reading Hebrews 11:4 through my accustomed theological glasses, something happened. I don’t know if my glasses slipped or if the truth just jumped from the page and knocked them off, but, without those tinted lenses, I saw the passage in a different light. Let me tell you what I saw and then let you be the judge.

Other persons in history have offered blood sacrificies in abundance and found their worship to be displeasing to God. To a sinful nation that had forsaken the Lord, God cried out through Isaiah, “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs, or of he-goats” (Isa. 1:4; 11). A similar rejection of Israel’s sacrifices was uttered through Jeremiah (Jer. 6:20).

The Lord was a witness against his evil people (Micah 1:2) by rejecting their offerings: “‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8).

God bore witness of their righteousness or wickedness by accepting or rejecting their sacrifices. It was not the details of the offerings that were being inspected but the heart of the worshiper. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8). “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent” (Prov. 21:27).

The man was being judged rather than his sacrifice. “And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Gen. 4:4f).

Now, look at Hebrews 11:4 again: “By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.” God bore witness to Abel’s righteousness by accepting his gift.

By his rejection of Cain and his offering, God bore witness, not to an improperly detailed ritual of worship, but to the wickedness of the man. John, the apostle, recognized Cain’s evil nature and urges “that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous (1 John 3: l1f). Cain was evil in heart, and the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.

Abel did not make an offering to achieve righteousness. He was righteous already because of his faith. God bore witness to that fact by accepting him and his offering.

Cain, on the other hand, evidently sought to achieve righteousness by rituals of worship when he was evil in heart.

That was a problem in Jesus’ day also. Because of their obstinance, the Jews kept traditions which nullified laws, and then had the audacity to worship. So, Jesus rebuked, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men’” (Matt. 15:7f).

Unfortunately, we have followed Cain’s philosophy in too many instances. We have endeavored to be righteous by scrupulously keeping holy details of ritualistic worship. Instead of worship being an expression from upright lives, we have made it an effort to

please God through certain formal exercises. It is not, for example, a matter of refraining from singing during the Lord's Supper, from participating in it on weekdays, or from singing with instrumental accompaniment, but of worship flowing from clean hearts.

Although the Genesis account tells what each man offered, it does not indicate that acceptance or rejection was due to what was offered. Each man offered the fruit of his labors. That is in harmony with our responsibility toward our talents and of God's acceptance of what a man has and not what he has not.

Because Abel acted "by faith" does not necessarily mean that he had been instructed concerning his sacrifice. It is common to misapply Romans 10:17 here: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (KJV). Paul is here defending the acceptance of Gentiles. The promise was that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." How was it that they came to believe and to be saved? They must have heard; so God had sent the preachers who had gone at the word, or command, of the Lord in the Great Commission, not on their own initiative. So, God was responsible for their belief. Exercises of worship are not under consideration in this passage.

At this time, I do not recall an instance in the Bible record where God rejected the sincere expressions of worship of any righteous man, even though his particular acts of devotion were not commanded of God.

Previously, the tint of my theological glasses allowed me to see in the story of Cain and Abel a strong warning that I not slip up on any ritualistic details and thereby fall short of attaining approval or righteousness. Without those glasses, however, I can see that righteousness, which is imputed because of faith, will bring forth loving rituals of adoration and spontaneous expressions of praise for what God has done for me. I trust that he will bear witness that I am already righteous by his offering, not by mine. *—1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, TX 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Central Church of Christ in Irving will conduct another conference for "less traditional" Churches of Christ in 1986. The date this time is Feb. 20-22, and the theme is "The Nature and the Challenge of Christian Liberty," based upon Galatians. The format

will be panel discussions as well as lectures, with emphasis on fellowship with each other. There will be a $20 registration fee to defray expenses. To get on their mailing list write to the church as 1710 W. Airport Fwy., Irving, TX 75062 or call 214-259-2631.

Holy Kiss must be the most unique of any publication among Churches of Christ. Published by An Accapella Chorus, (Box 66734, Houston, TX 77266), it is the ministry of "Church of Christ Gay Men and Lesbians." In the current issue Jimmy Maynard, a professor at Memphis State University, tells the story of how he began to deal with his sexuality while a student at Harding. As part of his testimony he writes: "We are maligned in sermons as perverts who molest children. We are persecuted when our Bible professors simplistically characterize homosexuals as repugnant filth. We are isolated in our struggle to reconcile our feelings about our self-worth with the attitudes of those who do not understand how we feel, that we are sensitive people who want to be like Christ but cannot change our sexual orientation anymore than they can." The paper features a favorite Church of Christ verse, Rom. 16:16, but this time it is the holy kiss that is billed rather than the name of the church. But it was the piece "New Orleans, From Fun to Worship" that got Ouida, which closed with "I trust that God will bless you, and that you will have a safe and enjoyable time in '01' New Orleans. See you in Sunday School." "01" is a famous gay bar at 901 Bourbon, known as Cafe Lafite in Exile. The writer tells the gays who are to visit New Orleans about the Churches of Christ in that city, one of which is "Prim and Proper" and not very friendly, and will not care whether you visit again. To fellowship the gays should be no problem since they are not anti-Sunday School.

A good way to get the old batteries recharged is to be at the Third Annual Christian Unity Conference, hosted by the University Church of Christ in Conway, Arkansas, Jan. 23-25, 1986, and led by J. Harold Thomas. Resource people this year include W. F. Lown and Bob Cannon, the former ministering among Christian Churches, the latter now a minister with Assemblies of God, though born and bred Church of Christ. It is to the credit of the University church that they can invite folk to share who may be a step or two removed from our traditions. I plan to be there, the Lord willing, and while there will be diversity of viewpoint in some areas, we will enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit together as we learn to love Christ more dearly and to follow him more nearly. Besides, Lea Hook of New Braunfels, Texas will be there, which is reason enough for anybody to attend, especially when she gives you a free copy of husband Cecil's book, *Free In Christ.* For further information write the church at 310 Donaghey, Conway, AR 72032 or call 501-329-9176.

Brethren from Christian Churches and Churches of Christ continue to have upbeat gatherings, and they are coming to see that they have far more in common than differences. They have Jesus in common and he is what matters. Marvin Phillips said

something like that when he gave the keynote for such a gathering in Houston, Nov. 4, with some 300 ministers and their wives at dinner together. Unity was the theme. The gathering was the effort of Mark Hickerson of the Christian Church and Calvin Warpula of the Church of Christ.

If you read James Michener's latest novel, *Texas,* just off the press, you will notice several references to the Church of Christ. Part of his research for such a *big* subject was at Abilene Christian University. One of his characters, a Texas-size Methodist minister, renounces that church and joins the Church of Christ. He became Texas-size in his opposition to instrumental music, for when the organ was brought into his church he threatened to burn the church down. I would say that Michener got the point. That just shows what happens to a good novelist when he stays in Texas too long, especially Abilene.

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BOOK NOTES

We have five matching bound volumes of *Restoration Review* that include nine years, 1976-1984. These are handsome library, hardbound volumes, with dustjackets, each with its own preface and table of contents. For the time being. we are offering all five volumes for only 35.00 postpaid. Individual volumes are as follows: *Principles of Unity and Fellowship* (1977), 5.50; *The Ancient Order* (1978), 5.50; *Blessed Are the Peacemakers and With All the Mind* (1979-80), 9.95; *Jesus Today* (1981-82) 9.95; *The Doe of the Dawn (1983*-84), 10.50.

Socrates, who built his philosophy around the dictum "The unexamined life is not worth living," would appreciate a new book by Michael Hall entitled *Emotions: Sometimes I Have Them/Sometimes They Have Me.* Socrates would like it because it is really a handbook for self-exploration. And what makes for a greater adventure than one's own selfhood? This book tells you how to say no to yourself and how to make your dreams therapeutic; it shows you how to turn your emotions on and off; it reveals that our emotions are ours to serve us, not to destroy us. And all this from the Christian perspective, deeply rooted in Scripture. The chapter on David as one who groped with repressions is unique. This book is a strike against emotional illiteracy. 7.95 postpaid.

One of the imperatives for us as a Bible people is more honesty about the Bible. An old book by Robert McAfee Brown, *The Bible Speaks to You,* has been reprinted with a new preface by the author, and it has been reprinted because of demand. You owe it to yourself

to read a book that really takes a hard look at some questions we never think to ask, such as *Where did the Bible come from?, What* is *the Bible?, How does God make himself known?, Why did people want to kill Jesus? Why can't I live by a set of rules?* And many more that will cause you to think. While more than 300 pages it is only 8.95 postpaid.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

The past famine which hit Ghana moved Ghanaians closer to God especially when unknown people from other parts of the world came to their aid. The result of this has been that many are giving themselves to Christ and are studying the Bible more. The church has also been recognized as "The True Church of Christ" as a chief in a village put it. —*Samuel Obeing, Kumasi, Ghana, West Africa*

(Jesus has assured us that the world will recognize us as true disciples when they see our love one for another. It is much better when a village chief sees us as "The True Church of Christ" because of our works of mercy than for us to make that claim based on a presumed doctrinal superiority. —*Ed.*)

One of the tragic things in our Brotherhood is the failure to utilize the talents of our sisters. Culture has leavened our Christianity more than we realize. I think of the editor of *Mission Journal,* Bobbie Lee Holley, who in my opinion is doing a good job. I commend her editorial in the October issue on "For Whom the Bells Toll." - L. E. Terry, Kansas City, MO

(We too commend Bobbie Lee Holley's work in *Mission.* To read a liberating journal edited by a not-so-liberal woman, subscribe to *Mission,* 12102 Tanglebriar Cove, Austin, TX 78750 ($12 for a year).

If it be His will I will celebrate number 90 next May 16th. I am sending the last issue of RR on to a friend whom I believe will subscribe since she has grown out of the party concept of His church. —*Stewart Hanson, Sr., Long Beach, CA*

(Ouida and I note with interest that Mother Pitts will also be 90 on May 16. This dear brother has long been a supporter of this journal and at 90 he is still at it. Through the years he has sent us many pungent lines in praise of unity, some of which we've published. —*Ed.*)

I was in the barbershop a few days ago when a young Oriental dropped in for a haircut. I introduced myself from the other chair. He is going to Washington University and I gave him my name and address in case he needed help. I told him I was a follower of Jesus and interested in relating to people as Jesus did. I told him that I belonged to no sect or denomination and wherever I found a Christian there I had a brother. This young man, born in Vietnam, could hardly believe that a stranger would be that interested in him. There are people all around us who need us and whom we need. Loneliness is acute in the asphalt jungle. —*Carl Ketcherside, St. Louis, MO*

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